

What's Happening in Idaho?

The Mule Deer Initiative is a statewide effort to improve mule deer habitat and increase mule deer numbers. The initiative focuses on:

Habitat:

- Improving and restoring mule deer habitat.
- Providing funds to assist private landowners with habitat restoration projects.
- Improving mule deer winter range with the help of sportsman's groups and volunteers.
- Restoring critical stands of aspen, sagebrush, and bitterbrush with the help of state and federal land management agencies.

Populations:

- Monitoring mule deer populations to provide more accurate information for setting seasons.
- Minimizing competition between deer and elk, where appropriate.
- Providing a variety of hunting opportunities, including for mature bucks.
- Minimizing deer/vehicle collisions.
- Managing motorized access during hunting seasons to increase deer survival and provide for nonmotorized hunting experiences.

Predators:

- Reducing predator populations, when and where appropriate.
- Researching predator/prey interactions to better understand when reducing predator populations will benefit mule deer.

Access:

- Encouraging landowners to provide hunter access.
- Encouraging access to public lands.

Communications:

- Keeping the public informed about what is being done to benefit mule deer.
- Involving hunters in mule deer management activities.

- Encouraging volunteer efforts to improve mule deer habitat.
- Recognizing private landowners participating in the program.

How You Can Help

Your support and involvement in the management of mule deer in Idaho is critical to the success of the program. Stay informed of the issues affecting mule deer in your area and volunteer time to help mule deer will ensure that Idaho's Mule Deer Initiative leaves a lasting legacy for future generations.

For more information about what activities are happening in your area or to offer assistance, contact the nearest Fish & Game office or visit the Fish and Game website at <http://fishandgame.idaho.gov>



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Idaho's Mule Deer Initiative



Mule Deer For the Future



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Idaho, like other Western states is experiencing overall declines in mule deer populations, although in some areas, mule deer numbers are stable or increasing. Because mule deer hunting is so important in Idaho, Fish and Game is committing additional personnel and resources to improving habitat and increase mule deer numbers. The Idaho Mule Deer Initiative is a statewide effort, but particular effort will be made across south and southeast Idaho.

Mule Deer in the West

Across the West, mule deer numbers have declined since the “good old days” of the 1950’s and 60’s. Mule deer populations are declining for a variety of reasons, including drought, habitat losses, predators, changes in hunting techniques, and access – just to name a few.

Habitat: Adequate supplies of food, water, shelter, and space are the building blocks needed to support healthy mule deer populations. The quality and quantity of habitat across the West has declined because of several factors including fire, drought, noxious weeds, and development.

Fire: Fire can be either “good” or “bad” for mule deer. The lack of fire in forested ecosystems has decreased important habitats such as aspen and shrub communities. Mule deer thrive on the browse, forbs and grasses that flourish after a fire or other natural disturbance. The tender, nutritious plants are easy to digest – especially for fawns going into their first winter or adults attempting to put on fat. By actively fighting fires, land managers have inadvertently reduced the food and shelter available for mule deer. Trees now shade out grasses, shrubs, and forbs. Junipers have encroached into critical fawning and winter ranges. Important aspen stands that provide forage, cover, and fawning habitat are disappearing.

Fire in many winter ranges, however, has reduced the amount of shrubs needed for food during the winter and increased the amount of weeds. Most invasive weeds do not make good mule deer habitat.

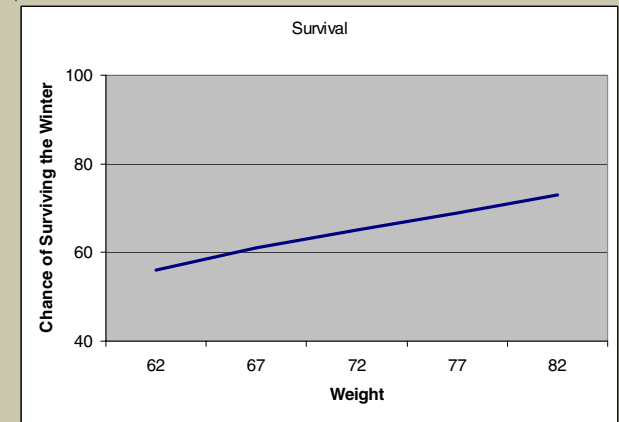
Weeds: Cheatgrass, knapweed, thistle, and other invasive weeds crowd out shrubs, forbs and grasses needed to support healthy mule deer populations. Weeds can also increase the frequency and intensity of fires, further reducing the food and shelter available to mule deer and other native wildlife. The bottom line is less food and less cover means fewer mule deer.

Development: Mule deer range has been reduced by human activity, pets, livestock, trains, and automobiles. Roads and railroads cut through traditional migration corridors and winter range. As homes, golf courses, streets, and parking lots move into these critical areas, mule deer are pushed into marginal habitat. This is especially difficult on mule deer during severe winters.

Predators: Predators, such as coyotes, mountain lions, wolves, bobcats and black bear, prey on mule deer. The effect of predators on total mule deer numbers varies from year to year. Changes in habitat, weather patterns, and other prey species all affect how much predators affect mule deer populations.

Competition: In some areas, elk are thriving where mule deer are declining. Elk are bigger, stronger, and able to survive more severe weather than deer. Changes in the type of grass and shrubs available may favor elk over mule deer. In other locations, there is direct competition between deer and elk for critical winter range.

Weather: Precipitation influences mule deer – and wildlife populations in general, more than any other factor. The amount and timing of precipitation affects plant growth, fire frequency and the quality of habitat. More significantly, it



influences the most important factor causing mule deer mortality – snow and cold temperatures. Deer need extra energy to move in deep snow and to maintain core body heat in cold temperatures. Fat reserves, built up during summer and fall months, provide this extra energy. This is especially critical for fawns. Research shows that larger fawns are more likely to survive the winter. (See chart.) The quality and quantity of habitat directly influences how effective mule deer are in putting on fat in the spring and summer.